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AN ESSAY
ON THE
EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE.

BY
JAMES SCOTT WALKER.

"Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To rust in us unused."

Shakespeare.

"Scire aliquid laus est; puer est nihil discere velle."

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY
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TO HENRY BROUGHAM, ESQ. M. P.

THE ENLIGHTENED ADVOCATE OF THE

EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE,

THIS ESSAY IS INSCRIBED, BY THE AUTHOR,

AS A SMALL, BUT GENUINE,

TOKEN OF RESPECT.



It was the intention of the Author of this Essay to give, in an Appendix, a brief exposition of a plan of his invention for the speedy exchange of the books of Mechanics and other Libraries, where economy of time and accuracy are indispensable, and which he has pursued with much success for upwards of twelve months, at the Liverpool Mechanics and Apprentices' Library—where the books of 200 readers are exchanged daily in two hours without confusion. But the length to which he has unwittingly been led in his remarks, constrains him to the mere announcement, that he will, on application, gladly communicate any information which may be desired, to gentlemen interesting themselves in similar institutions. The plan is favourably noticed in Mr. Brougham's pamphlet on Education, and has been adopted by several of the institutions recently established for the benefit of the working classes.

In page 23, near the bottom, for "temper mercy with justice," read "temper justice with mercy."
In page 47, (note) last line, for *Plutarch*, read *Petrarch*.

ON THE EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE.

ALTHOUGH the establishment, in many of our chief towns, of schools of art, libraries, and other institutions for public instruction, patronized and assisted by a numerous body of enlightened philanthropists, bespeaks the dawn of a brighter era in the history of our country, it is yet to be lamented that there are many individuals, whose co-operation is desirable, who are either unfriendly, or indifferent, to the diffusion of knowledge amongst the people at large. Such, indeed, is the effect a free press, upholding, for the most part, liberal and extended views on this subject, that those who are unfavourable to popular education seldom venture to give publicity to their opinions. But their silence is to be lamented, as it might otherwise be hoped that the controversy they would provoke would lead to their conversion ; for the gratifying revolution in the public mind in favour of a more liberal system of foreign and domestic policy lately introduced into the councils of the nation, affords the pleasing assurance that objections to the instruction of the people, whether founded on erroneous views, or on antiquated prejudices, would offer no stubborn resistance to arguments founded on the philosophy of the human mind, and the deductions of experience. If, however minute objections, that may be entertained, cannot be met, because they are not avowed, we may, at least, grapple with those which are more apparent ; and it is with this view that I am induced to lay before the public a few observations on

the merits of the general spread of knowledge. The cause is indeed worthy of an abler pen, but the flattering manner in which my late discourse to some of my townsmen was received, has induced me to turn my attention more fully to the subject, in the hope that even an individual of slender attainments may stumble upon some new arguments, or place some availing facts in a position which may attract the attention of those whose pursuits prevent them from studying the subject more at large. And I shall consider my endeavour gratefully repaid should I succeed in drawing over, from the ranks of opposition, a few converts to the cause of which I am the humble advocate.

That of late years England has borne, in her cities and in her plains, the impress of the rapid foot of improvement, is a fact which must gratify every generous heart. Recovering from the enervating effects of a long and fearful struggle, she has become not less successful in the cultivation of the amiable arts of peaceful life, that she was powerful and victorious in the field of battle. Amidst the political commotions which still agitate and debase a portion of civilized Europe, she has maintained that pre-eminence in domestic virtue, and that independence of spirit, which are alike the glory of the enlightened politician and of the private citizen. Whatever be the errors of her rulers, or the vices of her people, she may undoubtedly claim a brighter niche in the Temple of Freedom and Morality than any of the neighbouring states. But she has still errors to correct, and defects to supply. Though justly proud of her advancement, let that pride serve only to encourage her citizens to further exertions. The pride of excellence, if duly regulated, is amongst the most powerful and dignified stimulants to human improvement; but if it swell into the assumption of perfection, it induces a carelessness which, from the force of inertia natural in the moral as well as in the physical world, permits society to retrograde in the scale of civilization and refinement. From the man who thinks himself sufficiently wise, we in vain look for any emanation of genius. His acquirements, at the best, do not exceed mediocrity, and he sinks into the grave amongst those who leave behind them no monument of their worth or their talents. It is with a community as with an individual. It is not enough that a people reach a high state of refinement. Much exertion is required to maintain them in that condition, and still more to make further progress.

With what anxiety then ought we to regard the maintenance of our national improvements ! and with what caution ought we to listen to the too fashionable doctrine which overrates our attainments, and inflates us with the dangerous conceit, that we have so far outdistanced other powers that we may safely rest upon our oars, fearless of being overtaken !—To arrogate the perfection of Gods, is but to exhibit the imbecility of men. Though foremost in the race, other nations are advancing upon us, and some there are who promise to push us to our utmost speed. Those which are far behind—and which have had the weakness or the wickedness to abandon, or the misfortune to be despoiled of the blessings of freedom to which we owe our advancement—we will, I trust, regard with commiseration, and furnish them with a bright example of national virtue to rouse them to better things, rather than look down upon them with the eye of a haughty superior. But, admitting that we have immeasurably distanced other countries, it befits not a great nation to boast of her advantage over weaker states, and to magnify her own glory in the ratio of their degradation ; but, rather invigorated by the progress she has made, to imagine yet higher achievements of intellect and energy ; and in place of exulting in how far we have outstripped others, whom indolence or circumstance have depressed in the scale of humanity, adopting the nobler policy of a high minded people, to earn the meed of yet outstripping ourselves.

It has been said by a French author, that no man ever yet pushed his abilities so far as they were able to extend ; and if this may be affirmed of the most persevering and gifted of our species, as isolated individuals, how much may yet be accomplished by the collective engine of society, with its thousands of movements, each sustaining each ! and what great and good ends, by the division and economy of moral labour, may it not yet effect in its sublime volutions ! Yes ! mankind have within them that portion of the Divinity which invites from improvement to improvement, and is susceptible of all ; and this aptitude of progression towards perfection—which the mind can conceive, but which humanity, in its fleeting span, cannot reach,—is a pleasing and a rational illustration of the immortality of the soul. The human mind, indeed, is a tablet which the more it is polished the more it becomes beautiful in brightness and adaman-

time in strength; and we may blamelessly assume that the brightest lustre which it has yet attained, in any individual, is comparatively dimness to that of which it is susceptible, by the application of the recorded wisdom of ages, and the accumulating achievements of genius.

A brief review of the history of mankind will convince us that not only is the cultivation of science, learning and the arts compatible with the most admirable of public institutions, and with the power and glory of a state, but that knowledge has ever been coeval with civil liberty, and that mental degradation has been the concomitant of oppression and misrule. Genius has ever withered and died when placed within the malignant atmosphere of despotism: but when a people have once become widely intelligent, they have reared the strongest rampart of their independence. Were the minds of the wretched Africans even partially enlightened, they would, as well in policy as in feeling, shudder to contemplate the traffic in their kindred, which they now, with avaricious ignorance, abet. It is but three centuries since all Europe was enslaved; and it was learning, and the reflection which it excited, which roused her people to shake off the chains which ecclesiastical tyranny had for ages laboured to consolidate. Had mankind, in earlier ages, been generally enlightened, the pages of history would not have been so often stained with records of crime and oppression—of alliances of the few, who to gratify an iniquitous ambition, prostrated the rights of the many; and the bard of piety and freedom would not, in his generous indignation, have been roused to exclaim of monarchs,—

“Some take diversion in the tenced field,
And make the sorrows of mankind their sport;
But war’s a game, which, were their subjects wise,
Kings would not play at.* Nations would do well
To extort their truncheons from the puny hands
Of heroes whose infirm and baby minds
Are gratified with mischief, and who spoil,
Because men suffer it, their toy—the world.”

* “Even independent of the miseries occasioned by war, whether unsuccessful or successful, its long continuance is hostile and destructive to letters and to arts. The ferocious spirit which it excites is highly discordant with that disposition which consults not merely the being, but the well-being, of the human race; and endeavours to communicate to them the highest pleasures of which their nature is capable. In the arrogant estimation of brutal strength, wisdom and learning are effeminate and contemptible; and where those qualities are little esteemed, the attainment of them will no longer excite exertion. Even the interruption which takes place in the intercourse between different states, during the continuance of a war, is itself highly unfavourable to the progress of science and letters; as it prevents that free communication of discoveries and opinions between men of talents and genius, which excites a national and generous emulation, and has tended in a great degree to the improvement of mankind.” *Roscoe*.

Such, however have been the vicissitudes and the fate even of those ancient Empires, which, by their advancement in civilization, learning and science, have excited the astonishment and admiration of after ages, that doubts have been entertained of the possibility of the duration of eminence in the affairs of nations; and from the fall of Rome and Greece, with all their splendid examples of learning, and art, and patriotism, many philosophers have concluded that there is a manhood in nations as in the human frame; from which they must speedily retrograde in power and in glory, until like age-worn nature they sink into decay and dissolution. Could we admit this alarming hypothesis, it would become us to beseech the great Disposer of events to arrest the march of improvement, and to close the keen and searching eye of science, that we might rest contented in the mediocrity of our attainments, and never reach that proud intellectual eminence, whence we should be hurried on to the abyss of mental darkness and annihilation. But our apprehensions are happily dispelled when we examine the conduct of those nations which are set forth as the terrible examples of the presumption of men in the too close pursuit of intellectual cultivation. There exists indeed no analogy between the short-lived physical powers of the body, and the moral faculties called into action in a well regulated community. The former have necessarily their childhood, maturity and decay, and the infant of to-day has to acquire vigour by the same patient process as he of a former age; the latter, by means of the press, the pencil, and the chisel, are in a great degree transferrable, and, while the human soul remains capable of reception and cultivation, may be perpetuated, in their full vigour, from generation to generation. Intelligence, unlike the physical powers, blooms with fresh vigour as it advances in years, and the blessings which it diffuses can only be abrogated by a people who have once possessed them—when, sinking into the slumber of indolence and sensuality, they permit some daring adventurer to fasten the yoke upon their necks. We accordingly find that the downfall of great empires has been preceded by a laxity of public morals, or the invasion of popular rights by unprincipled rulers, when the people were lulled into a fancied and fatal security. Rome fell from her high estate by an inordinate extension of her dominions, and the demoralizing effects of conquest too easily achieved. In her better days she

indeed produced some choice and extraordinary spirits, whose patriotic devotion assumed a character of sublimity. But both the Greeks and the Romans were ignorant of those humane and generous ordinations of society, which amongst polished nations of the present day are so closely interwoven with the habits and opinions of men, as to be scarcely deserving of the name of virtue. They were both guilty of the barbarous practice of exposing their children, and thus dissevered the meliorating ties of consanguinity. Murder and bloodshed went frequently unpunished amongst them, and even in Athens the authorities, on one occasion, publicly proclaimed that it was the will of the Gods that force should constitute right—and it was therefore held that the weak had no right to what they could not defend. In Athens, too, courts of justice were rendered often worse than nugatory, for the whole people (who in cases of public excitement could only be deemed the mob) were the ultimate arbiters in every case. One author goes the length of affirming that “the history of ancient Greece presents nothing to the reader but usurpations, assassinations, and other horrid crimes;” and it has been truly said, that if Rome was behind her in the fine arts, she soon outstripped her in every vice. In fine, the Greeks and Romans, though they have never been excelled, or never perhaps equalled, in architecture, sculpture, and polite letters, were deplorably deficient in all the moral excellencies of domestic government, and in those institutions which give the people a wholesome controul over their rules, and without which no nation can reach that high and “palmy state,” which shall render it truly great or permanently prosperous. Glutted with conquest, Rome sunk into the arms of voluptuousness. The patriotic energy which before held her erect in her course, died away, and every public security was thrown down. Her generals taking advantage of the looseness of society, broke through every restraint; she was scourged by a long succession of tyrants; and she would have fallen through her own corruption, had not the northern barbarians then made easy incursions into her territory, and spread desolation and ruin. The western Empire fell at the feet of the Goths, and the Romans, from being the most polished people of the world, imbibing the savage manners of their conquerors, sunk into ignorance and barbarism. The eastern Empire survived the western for a thousand years, while learning held but

a feeble existence under illiterate men ; but its military strength being at length decayed, it was annihilated by the hords of Mahomet. The Grecian Empire, which had for centuries been a province of Rome, abandoning her propriety, fell a prey to the Turks ; and the ruin of Sparta may be ascribed to a similar cause, accelerated by a breach of the laws of Lycurgus. Rome owed her greatness to her patriotism ; her downfall to her immorality. And it was well remarked by Phocion to Aristias, "Accustom yourself to discern in the fate of nations, that recompense which the Author of Nature has annexed to the practice of virtue. No state ever ceased to be prosperous, but in consequence of having departed from those institutions to which she owed her prosperity." The destiny of nations is assuredly in their own hands, and had Rome maintained her high character for patriotic virtue and devotion, had she pursued no ambitious conquests, and had her people been more vigilant of their rights, the Roman Republic might have flourished for ages beyond the period of its fall.

The assumption that nations must necessarily decline when they have reached a lofty eminence in civilization, and learning, and power, is but, in other words, to assert that intelligence contains within itself the germ of its own decay, and that mankind must submit to a periodical debasement of intellect. This position appears to me to be not only irrational, but impious. It questions not only the power of the human mind to retain its highest acquirements, but it fancifully selects the very moment of its furthest enlargement as that least capable of the retention. And it questions the beneficence of God, who is thus involved in wantonly exciting the hopes and sporting with the destinies of his creatures in the only attribute in which they assimilate to him.

Another class of reasoners would damp the ardour of intellectual research by decrying the present age and its capacities ; and, garnishing forth every attainment of our predecessors, endeavour to humiliate the existing race by the comparison. The virtues and good qualities of the dead are set forth against the vices and defects of the living, in order to inculcate the fatal delusion that all our efforts at amelioration are in vain, and that God has paralyzed the limbs and seared the brains of the present generation of men. The libel is frequently uttered by those who have been for years chained to the study of the ancient

classics alone, which they have learned they may safely place amongst the brightest gems of human intellect; and thus, with a smattering of the literature of former times, and an ignorance of that of their own age, they bewail the degeneracy of the moderns. But we have no such demonstration of the divine wrath. We have indeed drawn largely from the pure fountains of ancient lore, but the waters of a brighter philosophy have mingled with the stream. The respect entertained for the ancients is sincerely evinced by the unanimous assent of the civilized world to consider their works as the foundations of learning, and the standards of taste. Our cities exhibit, in every street, specimens of the unrivalled elegance of the architecture of Greece; our halls are adorned by their all but life-breathing statuary,—imperishable studies for the pencil or the chisel of the artist; and their literature (which, after those who penned it had perished, burst over the face of benighted Europe, and hastened the return of civilization and liberty) is still regarded as furnishing the finest models of exalted style, manly eloquence and poetical grandeur. But however prolific the garden of intellect in former times, it is not now less productive of whatever may elevate the character, or enhance the happiness of man. Genius, indeed, is of no country and of no age; and that Italian land which is now trodden by the bigot and the slave is the same whereon patriotic virtue once raised her throne, and learning inscribed her fairest pages. We are not less brave and skilful in war than were the ancients, although our manner of warfare be less revolting than the slaughter which delighted the heroes of Troy. In philosophical attainments, we leave them far behind; and for a mythology which distinguished their Gods by the basest of human passions, we embrace a more rational—a more humanizing system of theology. If they had their Homer, their Socrates, their Cicero, their Pericles, and a glorious band of sages and patriots, the moderns can boast of a Shakspeare, a Curran, a Hampden, a Sydney, a Russel; and the names of a Newton, a Franklin, a Locke, a Milton, a Pope, a Byron, and (for I travel not beyond our own little island) a thousand other worthies, bear ample testimony to the yet undiminished brightness of the human mind. In the guiltless arts of domestic life the palm is due to the present age; and our advancement in chymistry, in

practical philosophy, and mechanics, enables us to bend the most stubborn materials of nature to our purposes. Thousands of our keels furrow every sea, (vessels to which even the gorgeous barge of Cleopatra were but as a shell) and our voyagers, penetrating to the uttermost regions of the earth, approximating, as it were, island to island, and continent to continent, return home rich in scientific discovery, and loaded with the available products and curiosities of nature—filling our mansions with whatever is elegant or useful, our gardens with the choicest plants, and our dispensaries with the refreshing balms of every clime.

The age has its meed of homage. Would that the picture might here be left with the admiration which a hasty view of its boldest features tends to inspire ! But there are optical delusions in the distant perspective. The general show of magnificence, the crowded mart, the lengthened street, and the well-tilled valley, may bespeak a happy and a highly intellectual people ; but a nearer examination will show, that though the beams of prosperity gladden the foreground, there are shadows deep and gloomy behind. In the unobtrusive vales of society, ignorance and misery beset a portion of the people, and the genuine philanthropist has yet a wide field for his exertions. The proofs of this unwelcome fact will be found in the squalid poverty of thousands of our city poor ; in the abrogation, by a portion of the operative classes, of the manly sports of their fathers for the intemperance of the tavern ; and relaxations not less effeminate than unprofitable ; in the vulgar admiration of the ruffian combats of our prize-fighters, with all their demoralizing concomitants ; in the too frequent want of feeling to the brute creation ; in fine, in the population of our workhouses and our gaols. That many of these evils have their origin in ignorance and immorality, in domestic improvidence, in folly, or in wickedness which public laws cannot always arrest, no one who has studied the character of society can deny ;—and that they may be reduced by the mental cultivation of the people, will not, it is hoped, be deemed a bold assumption. Mischief is the offspring of ignorance ; and, happily, its effects seldom fail to recoil upon the heads of the perpetrators. The man whose vices or spoliations afflict society, is a traitor to himself as well as to them : and it was well urged by Polonius in his advice to his son ;—

"To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

To form a just estimate of the meliorating influence of education, man must be contemplated in the rudest state of barbarism (for every advance from that state involves a degree of mental acquirement) in contrast with the same being imbued with the light of intelligence. Much has been said of uncultivated tribes, whose innocence of life, and apparent magnanimity, indicate a susceptibility of enjoyment, remote from the complicated cares of polished society, and all "the ills that flesh is heir to;" and it has been hence gravely argued that civilization has done nothing for the happiness of man. But where are those happy beings who, without subordination and constraint, enjoy security of person or of property; who rear up families without cares or anxieties; who associate together in harmony, the weak and the strong enjoying all things in common, without bickerings and animosities? or where is the favoured climate, however prolific, which will supply even the necessaries of life without labour and its fatigues? There is no such land; and it were needless to combat a doctrine the sum of which is that "ignorance is bliss," and that the curse of misery is affixed to the cultivation of intellect. Addison beautifully remarks, that "the human soul, without education, is like marble in the quarry, which shows none of its inherent beauties till the skill of the polisher fetches out the colours;"—and it will truly be found that the innocence, the artlessness, the magnanimity of uneducated man, is but the poetical dream of the enthusiast, or the theme of the misanthrope, who, in revenge for the just scorn of the polished world, dresses up the savage with fancied virtues and perfections. Even Virgil's shepherds would lose all claim to our admiration were they deprived of their powers and their love of song, and of the pastoral arts of a polished state of society, and left with the vacuity of mind which the mere tending of a flock would induce. In selecting a subject for examination, it matters not whether he be taken from amongst the Ashantees, who immolate thousands of human victims to propitiate the shades of their heroes, or exhibit the uncontrolled power of their princes; or from the shivering Esquimaux, feasting in genuine luxury on the nauseous entrails of a fish, and the current of whose soul is as cold as the

fields of ice that surround him. Some tribes, from a variety of local circumstances, are fierce and unsocial; others, from the necessity of herding together, are of a more gentle and inoffensive character;—but in all there are hideous perversions of the noble uses to which man is purposed. To speak generally, the savage confesses no law but physical force. The delicate operations of nature never arrest his attention. He is contented to snatch wherewithal to supply his wants in the general scramble with the brutes. The world is to him bounded by his own little horizon, and all is vapid and profitless that is not already fashioned to administer to his appetites. The fair earth is to him a flat, with little more that is available than if its products were depicted on the lifeless canvas. The idol of his adoration is a block or a stone, and he is beset with the most ridiculous superstition, or the most horrid and murderous fanaticism.—Destitute of all excitement to industry beyond the pursuits of the chase, his mind broods in listlessness, or seeks activity in the plunder and destruction of his fellow men. He knows not the value of honesty, and adroitness in spoliation is, with him, a virtue. His affections are as inconstant as his life is wandering. There is oft a treachery in his friendship, and where his enmity is directed—“Hope withering flies, and Mercy sighs farewell.” Even in our own polished state of society the ignorant man is often wholly useless, or wholly mischievous. His mind is prone to take an erroneous bias, and to revenge itself upon society for its defects. And how many do we find whose lives are but as “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!”

It is refreshing to turn from the desolate picture of ignorance, and consider the influence of learning as the great civilizer of man. Education softens the asperities of his nature, and inculcates all those mutual kindnesses and affections which give a new charm to existence. It inspires him with a desire for elegance and comfort, and induces that application by which he can derive both from the rudest materials. It assuages the rigours of war, and even blends humanity with revenge; and it uproots ungenerous prejudices, and implants good fellowship by inspiring its possessors with a mutual respect. Learning and its concomitants have conduced in a high degree to our domestic

dignity and enjoyment. In the earlier ages, when war was a trade, and force a valuable distinction, men placed but little value upon the gentler sex. Woman was regarded as a mere household creature, to crouch at the haughty bidding of her lord; and the softer feelings of the sex were despised or extinguished. But learning has taught us to award to this fairest portion of the creation her proper station in society, and the enjoyments of home, and the tender links of kindred, with all those humanities and charities which refine the whole fabric of society, have been the invaluable result.

What a world of delight is open to the man of science and learning, in whom we behold

"Nature gentle, kind,
By culture tamed, by liberty refreshed,
And all the radiant fruits of truth matured!"

Whatever his situation in life, all his enjoyments are enhanced by the delights, the triumphs, the soothing powers of intelligence. When he walks abroad the flowers of the field assume to him a more beautiful hue; the valley echoes with a thousand notes of gladness. The blue hills, rising in their sublimity, calm his soul to contemplation. The animals range unmolested around him, claim his caresses, and become subservient to his uses. The very elements submit to his dominion; and with the lever of science he can remove the most gigantic barriers that nature has opposed to his commerce or convenience. The vessel under his pilotage rolls over the vast world of waters, and he holds his course by the guidance of the planets. He invites the fearful lightning from the clouds, and conducts it harmless to the bosom of the earth. When he traces the ceaseless current of animal and vegetable life in the subtle economy of nature, and embraces in thought the magnitude and harmony of the universe, he is impressed with a grateful admiration of the Divine Architect who regulates the immeasurable whole; and when he contemplates that still nobler world, the human mind, and its capacities, and reflects that he alone in this fair creation is gifted to appreciate and to adore, he may, in his blameless pride, exclaim with the great dramatist—"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a God!"

No man who neglects the improvement of his mind can have any conception of the pure and dignified pleasures that continually flow in upon those who have laid up even a moderate share of the stores of learning and science. Neither is he aware of the extent of the sacrifice he makes, not only of his happiness in after-life, but of his self-interest as regards his success in the world, if he neglects the opportunities for instruction which may present themselves before he reaches the meridian of life. The celebrated Bacon writes, that "a man's nature runs either to herbs or to weeds, therefore let him seasonably water the one and destroy the other;" and enlarging on this idea, we may consider the mind like a vast and prolific garden, which, with proper attention, will produce the most delicious fruits. The youthful cultivator may enjoy the stimulating reflection that he will pass the evening of his days in the never-fading bowers which have risen beneath his hands. But he who neglects the culture of the mind wanders through life as through a wilderness, and when the vigour of youth is spent in the vain pursuit for some hoped-for delectable spot, accessible only through the guidance of industry and science, the winter of age overtakes him, and, benighted and chagrined, he sees nothing around him but a dark and cheerless desert.

From individual, we come to national advantages, derived from the cultivation of science, learning, and the arts. And what the elegant and philanthropic Roscoe says of the higher studies in these departments, will apply with equal cogency to those general branches which come more immediately within the pale of popular education. "It would" says that writer "be in vain to expect that the arts and sciences should flourish to their full extent in any country where they were not preceded, or accompanied, by a certain degree of stability, wealth, and competency, so as to enable its inhabitants to withdraw their attention from the more laborious occupations of life, and devote it to the speculative inquiries and the pleasures derived from works of art. Whenever a state attains this enviable pre-eminence, and enjoys also the blessings of civil and political liberty, letters and arts are also introduced; not, indeed, as a positive convention of any people, but as a natural and unavoidable result. Nor has the cultivation of these studies been injurious to the prosperity, the morals, or the character of a people. On the

contrary, they have usually exhibited a reaction highly favourable to the country where they have been cherished ; not only opening new sources of wealth and exertion, but by exalting the views, purifying the moral taste, enlarging the intellectual, and even the physical powers of the human race, and conferring on the nation where they have once flourished a rank and distinction in the annals of mankind the most honourable and the most durable that can be attained."

There are still, however, some men who entertain doubts of the policy or propriety of extending literary and scientific instruction to the people at large, lest it would disturb the relative position of the higher and lower classes of society ; and there are others, who, cherishing a portion of the monastic prejudices of a darker age (which denied even the *right* of mental cultivation to the poor) would permit the field of science to be trodden only by a privileged few. To the latter I shall first address myself ;—and I would but request those who doubt of the right of every man to cultivate his mind, to contemplate the vast capabilities of the human soul, its desires, and its "longing after immortality,"—and remembering with what unerring nicety the scales of destiny are poised, and that not an atom is without its purpose,—I would ask them, can they remain steadfast in their heresy that the Divine Architect would imbue his noblest work with hopes, and feelings, and faculties, merely to embitter his earthly existence ; or would kindle him with high aspirations to smoulder in everlasting inactivity ? Such an assumption were a blasphemy more to be pitied than reviled ; for I hold it to be an immutable position, that intellect is a spark of the Divine Spirit, given unto man as a sacred and improvable birthright ; and which, when cherished into a flame, ascends, the most grateful offering of humanity, to the Creator of the universe.

To those who are of opinion that even the moderate share of intelligence which a mechanic may imbibe, from books or lectures, during the short cessation from his labour, would tend to render him proud, inattentive to his work, and insubordinate to his employers, it may be answered, that intelligence can no more inflate the mind with inordinate conceit, than it can debase it into abject servility. It has rather the effect of reducing overgrown pretensions, by convincing us how little we, in reality, know ; how far we are removed from perfection ; and how much we

must struggle to attain ere we can satisfy our own honourable ambition, or command the lasting approbation of a discerning community. History, and the examples daily before his eyes, will convince the mechanic that it is not by contemning his seniors, or neglected their instruction, that a trade or craft, which is worth the learning, is to be acquired. To assume the master, without the master's skill and experience, were indeed a hazardous game; for as Phaeton, when he daringly took the guidance of the chariot of the sun, whose fiery steeds had been accustomed to a wariar hand, was dashed to the burning earth for his temerity, so, insubordinate pretension brings at once its overthrow and disgrace. But if there be still those who endeavour to reconcile the anomaly that a course of education, which comprises the instruction of the operative classes in their relative duties in society, would tend to render them inattentive and insubordinate, happily they can be referred to the testimony of facts. There are few respectable masters, and surely none avowedly, who would not employ a workman of intelligence, rather than a man who had barely capacity for the performance, under his own constant inspection, of the commonest branches of his trade, and in whom he can have no confidence when he is not on the spot. An intelligent workman, too, may often become of the utmost value to masters or proprietors, in cases where extraordinary exertions are required, or where foremen or overseers fall a prey to sickness or death. There can be little doubt, but without some generally intelligent workmen, extensive establishments, involving even a national interest, would frequently stand still. The selection from the workmen of a new overseer falls inevitably on the most intelligent and skilful, and affords a practical proof that intelligence enhances the utility of every labourer. The case will also apply to maritime life. A few months only have elapsed since it was announced in the New York papers, that a fine and valuably laden ship belonging to Salem, and which had lost both captain and mate by sickness on a distant voyage, was safely carried to her port of destination by a young man of eighteen years of age, one of the crew, who, to his honour, though poor, had early applied himself to the study of navigation.*

* Mr. Brougham, the Rev. A. Wilson, and others, have lately furnished several examples of the advancement of workmen in consequence of their attendance at Mechanics' Institutions.

Again ; the late combinations in which violent or unmanly conduct has been resorted to, (and there are only a few isolated cases) have been, without almost an exception, the work of the most ignorant men of the trade to which they belonged : and their proceedings have been publicly deprecated by the general body of workmen, amongst whom are many intelligent men, who have headed their fellow-labourers in urging their claims with temperance, and without infringing the law. The dictation to masters, the intimidation of men, and the absurd regulations of the London shipwrights, have all been the result of ignorance, combined with the distresses arising amongst the workmen from the high prices of provisions ; and in place of forming a ground for the discouragement of education amongst them, ought to urge those who have the means, the more strenuously to promote it. Were the men better informed, I do not say they would not combine,—for cases have occurred, and will occasionally occur, where, in justice to themselves, they must use means to obtain a fair price for the only stock they have to dispose of—their labour ; but combinations would assume no dangerous or violent character, and reasonable overtures would never fail to be met in a proper spirit. The men have, on this point, I am of opinion, sometimes been unmeritedly aspersed. They are not prone to combine. A strike is always attended with distresses to themselves, which they would not rush upon, but upon compulsory occasions,—and in fact, the advances which many master tradesmen have made of wages, and some of them, to their honour, upon a bare requisition, is evidence of the general justice of the claims of the workmen. If they have, in some cases, been intemperate, let it be remembered that, as Lord Bacon says, there is no rebellion so terrible as the rebellion of the belly :—and it is to be hoped that the liberty now enjoyed by both parties freely to dispose of their marketable commodity to the highest bidder, will speedily introduce amongst them a feeling of kindness and conciliation, which shall be productive of mutual benefit.

The advantage of education to the working classes receives a further confirmation from the Report of the late Committee of the House of Commons, on their inquiry into the laws relative to masters and workmen. It was stated on evidence, by several intelligent and respectable master tradesmen, who had long employed numbers of workmen, that the conduct of their servants

had, of late years, exhibited a marked improvement ; that they were more industrious, more respectful to their overseers, and more provident and exemplary in their domestic concerns ; and on being asked to what they ascribed so favourable an amendment, they give an unequivocal opinion that it arose from the increase, of late years, in the diffusion of knowledge amongst the people.

Did those of the higher classes, who would monopolize learning, come into the world with some exclusive gift of prescience or mental energy, their claims would be worthy of deep consideration ; but it is found that the mind is to be sublimated only by education, and that genius smiles with equal benignity upon the plebeian and upon the noble. Intelligence, indeed, is a republican goddess, to whom all who worship become legitimate subjects ; and he who would seduce them from their allegiance is the veriest of traitors, for he would sink his country in the scale of civilization, and weaken her firmest barrier against foreign aggression. " Knowledge is power ;" and let it be borne in mind, that as science, learning, and all those arts which elevate and enrich a country, can spring up, in the first instance, only under the kindly protection of a free government ; so do they, in their maturity, cherish and protect that freedom which kindled them into life. There is no nation that is intelligent but would sacrifice her dearest enjoyments to repel an invasion of her rights,—and eschew all innovations in her institutions, which did not, in reason, justify an expectation of benefit to the community.

If we gaze upon the map of the world, and reflect upon the vicissitudes by which some of its finest portions have, for ages, been, and still continue to be, desolated, we shall arrive at the undeniable inference that an ignorant people, however favoured by locality, cannot permanently enjoy either wealth, or glory, or independence. The effeminate Hindoo may, indeed, recline on the gilded palanquin ; and he may be fanned and tended by hundreds of slaves who tremble at his beck ; but while he thus drags on an idle and a drowsy existence, he is the slave of the most odious idolatry and superstition ; an idolatry, which, destroying every noble faculty, renders him the mere shadow of manhood, and which, by a refinement in folly, consigns, on his death, the wife of his bosom to the funeral pile.

Were his country sterile and unproductive, no foreign foot would have invaded his territory ; but European avarice discovered at once his wealth and his weakness, and bound him down with what to a people of mind would be but a chain of glass, but with which he amuses himself, as an infant with its baubles.

Our tenure of the vast Empire of India is upheld by a politic, but a guilty acquiescence, in the ceremonies, and idle customs, and superstitions of its inhabitants. It is not my province here to inquire whether we have enriched ourselves by a mere acquisition of territory, or added to our security by preventing India from falling into the hands of rival powers ; neither shall I here urge the awful responsibility which we incur by maintaining in subjection that country and others of our colonies, without redeeming the offence of conquest, by some energetic exertions to enlighten the people, and render them fit for the blessings of civil liberty ; but I adduce India, and I may add Africa, as examples, that the ignorance of a people is their weakness, and invites the more powerful, even though they inhabit another hemisphere, to conquest and aggression, which may close every avenue to melioration, by perpetuating ages of vassalage and debasement. But we may embrace a more proximate example of the natural insecurity which is inseparable from ignorance. The ignorant and intolerant Mahomedan may, indeed, for a time wield with success the bloody cimeter against his Christian neighbours ; but he stoops, submissive, to the will of the most inveterate of tyrants, by whose sole mandate he may to-day be elevated to the highest pinnacle of power, and to-morrow, with equal ease and unconcern, be consigned to the bowstring. It is an important fact, too, that Turkey owes not her independence to her arbitrary governors, or to the savage prowess of her soldiers : these would but ill compensate for the feebleness arising from the gross and immoral manners of an ignorant population, were it the policy of any of the higher powers of Europe to possess themselves of her territory : but her position and maritime coast, with relation to the possessions and trade of these powers, in the Mediterranean, has alone preserved her. The state which overran her would, by gaining a preponderance in the balance of power, provoke the hostility of all the others ; and the consequently doubtful result of such a conquest, has not only enabled Turkey to escape foreign invasion, but has, by the

dexterous diplomatic manœuvres of foreign ministers, saved her from dismemberment, amidst domestic tyranny and dissensions.

We have another and more important instance of the effects of a want of education amongst a people—in the Austrian Empire. The Emperor of Austria, as did his royal ancestors before him, cherishes a deplorable antipathy to the progress of knowledge. He, indeed, assumes the virtue of encouraging learning, and reckons up in his proclamations numerous schools and institutions which never had an existence; but half of his dominions are still involved in Gothic barbarity. “An elegant writer (remarks the Edinburgh review) aptly compares the despotism of Austria to a noxious vapour, blighting every thing it lights upon.” Her rulers, indeed, have ever persecuted learning, and striven to perpetuate a reign of ignorance coeval with their own. And what has Austria gained by thus placing genius and learning under her ban? Truly, a mere degraded animal existence. With twenty-eight millions of inhabitants, and with a larger territory than France, (it is observed by the same authority) she has been insulted and “trampled on successively by Gustavus Adolphus, by Kara Mustapha, by Louis XIV. and by Napoleon.” Her Emperors have been compelled—the result of their slavish policy—to cringe and fawn at one time to powers to which, when danger was afar, they imperiously dictated their own terms. The faith of Austria towards foreign states has been consistent with her unprincipled administration at home. Her treaties and engagements are only kept inviolate, until the fear of chastisement is removed, and she then casts them to the winds with the insolent triumph of a national juggler. Her whole history is a series of outrages and wanton oppressions, repulsive to sound policy and humanity. The enemy of knowledge, she has ever been the foe of freedom; and, despite her improvable resources at home, and the contributions she exacts from Italy for the curse of her military occupation, so villainous is her economy, that her finances border upon beggary, and five times has she been bankrupt during the last war. Whence, indeed, could she derive a flourishing revenue? With a wisdom suited to the measure of the Royal mind of Austria, all foreign commerce is restricted, and thus are the main sources of national industry dried up. There is no country of the same standing and population (as indeed it might be expected, under such a despotism)

which has produced fewer learned men. This is not attributable to any natural defect of her people, for, occasionally, men of genius have gleamed up amongst them ; but to the inquisitorial prohibition of works, whether of foreign or home production, which embrace liberal and philosophical views of government or science ; and the English ear is not familiar with the names of a dozen Austrians who have benefited their country or mankind by their genius or researches. It is well for the world that ignorance and poverty go hand in hand ; for weapons of war are dangerous in the hands of fools ; and had Austria the means, her aggressions would be as boundless abroad as at home. As it is, with her myriads of half-starved soldiers, she is ever ready to be hired, by the highest bidder, to do the iniquity of war, and she has only escaped retributive conquest herself, from the position and magnitude of her territory, and from her people being considered as a sort of useless reptiles—a mere swarm of wasps, whose nest it would take some trouble to smoke, and in which the conqueror would find no honey for his pains.

To the deplorable policy of Austria, and its effects in rolling back the tide of civilization, may be added that of Ferdinand of Spain, who, aided by an invasion, the atrocity of which I shall not here measure, has succeeded in re-establishing the reign of darkness and fanaticism. Spain is, indeed, a terrible example of the blighting effects of a want of moral energy in a once warlike and high-minded people. But the day of retribution may yet arrive. Revolt may slumber for a time ; but he who, disregarding the voice of a people, erects his iron throne upon the ruins of his country's commerce, and happiness, and integrity, stands upon a volcano, which may erewhile burst upon him. And it is devoutly to be hoped that the intelligence which is daily brightening upon mankind, and which has already roused a Southern Continent to the achievement of her independence, will yet penetrate to wherever the chain, or the lash, or the bayonet, or the inquisition, are the instruments of domination, and hasten the approach of an era when the free exercise of the energies and resources of every land will be combined for the general benefit of mankind. The examples here adduced will convince a considerate mind, that in place of pausing to consider to what extent education may be safely conveyed to those who constitute the great mass of the people, or where we are to draw the line

of demarkation, beyond which humble aspirants to knowledge are not to proceed,—our apprehension out to be, lest we cannot sufficiently instruct them in the duties which they owe to society and to themselves, by assiduously cultivating their minds, that they may avoid the sufferings and the fate of those who have been debarred from moral improvement, or have been negligent of its pursuit.

The Emperor of Austria declares, that he wants no “learned men,”—he wants “good subjects;” and Ferdinand decrees death to those who whisper “death to tyrants;” but in spite of these denunciations, we may safely assume that learning is not incompatible with loyalty. We have many splendid instances of their union in our own island, and it is pleasing to reflect, that amidst the representatives of the British people in parliament, and amongst our nobility, (without receding further from the throne) there are many men whose genius and acquirements are worthy of the fairest pages in the history of the world.

There may be some who apprehend, that were the people generally educated, there would be so powerful a competition of talent, that all would be desirous of becoming masters, and, trenching upon the privileged orders, would “push them from their stools.” A simple argument will serve to answer the objection. The very worth and value of a man to society is his intelligence and aptitude for some purpose of utility or gratification; and he alone who excels by his industry or talents, in adding to the general stock of comforts or of luxuries, is worthy of the highest rewards. Upon this principle the talented man would rise to his proper altitude, the man of ordinary attainments would maintain a middle station, and the idler, or the dunce, would sink to the bottom. Here there is no injustice. The greatest portion of talent would thus be elicited, and a correspondent improvement would take place in the moral and physical powers of the community; and, consequently, in their mode of life—in their homes and enjoyments. If the workmen were all as talented as their present masters, there would still be found masters capable of directing them. The increased command over inanimate nature, would lead to new discoveries; every product of art would be of a superior quality; for it is chimerical to suppose that human ingenuity may not be exerted

in an infinitely greater degree than at present, upon the mass of inexhaustible materials which commerce and locality place within our reach. Those, of the higher orders, who now spend their days in listlessness, (and this would be no mean advantage of popular education) would be impelled, in order to maintain their ascendancy, to studies which would do honour to themselves, and benefit their country; and if the artisan arrived at that state of ease, when, in place of a contracted room, he could afford a house equal to that of his present master, no alarm need be entertained lest the higher classes would suffer by the change; on the contrary, the master would be provided with a better mansion; and the genuine nobleman with a palace.

But let me not excite unfounded apprehension amongst those who fear, that if the people were better informed, the places they enjoy would be filled by those who would better administer to the public good—or amongst those who consider that a well plenished purse is ample atonement for an empty head, and who are desirous of wearing the cap and bells without molestation. The “consummation” hypothetically imagined, although it is “devoutly to be wished,” is yet far distant, if, indeed, it be not, in a great degree, impracticable. The progress of knowledge need excite no alarm. The seeds of genius are but thinly scattered, and few there are that blossom to perfection. Few men become eminent in more than one science or acquirement. Individual talent seldom adds more than a minute fraction to the general sum of human knowledge. To administer to the necessities and refinements of an enlightened country, the efforts of thousands of talented individuals are required, even though ages of science have marshalled them the way. And when we consider that much ingenuity is exerted to complete even our commonest manufactures, and that without the aid of the chymist, the researches of the mineralogist, the skill of the engineer, and a constant accession of mechanical and philosophical improvements, the highly polished wheels of society would become clogged and motionless in the grand competition with nations more favoured by situation or fertility, we shall feel assured that our national prosperity is involved in our intellectual improvement, and that it is the bounden duty of every individual, who has the power, to give encouragement to the acquirement of knowledge amongst all classes of the people.

To suppose that, even with all appliances, the market would be overstocked with talent, and that few would be willing to do the drudgeries of life, is to assume that all men have the inclination and capacity to become eminent in their several pursuits. But the soil of intellect is as various and diversified as that which incrustates the material world. Though some parts are abundantly productive, there are vast tracts where the plough of learning cannot break the stubborn clods. There are bleak and arid deserts in the world of mind, whereon all the soft dews of heaven may fall, and produce no grateful verdure. With whatever industry philanthropy may strive to pluck out the noxious weeds, in the luxuriance of a highly artificial state of society the hemlock of perversity will still be rife; and there will still spring up abundance of those obdurate plants, fit only to be fashioned into instruments for the coarser offices of life. And as some herbs and flowers thrive and blossom on the storm-beaten mountain or the rock, so there are men to whom the rude labours of society can alone be congenial; men who are unfit for a higher sphere of life, and who are contented in their own.

Amongst the practical proofs that intelligence has a tendency to form better men and better subjects, may be adduced the daily experience of our courts of justice. The records of crime bear ample testimony, that, on an average of years, not only the greater number, but the greater enormity of offences are on the side of ignorance. Our judges, indeed, aware of the superior force of temptation when acting upon an uneducated mind, in most cases humanely temper mercy with justice in the punishment of uneducated criminals, while those rarer offenders, who have received an education which qualifies them to see more clearly the measure of their guilt, are visited by the severity of the law. Of those who have expiated their crimes on the scaffold, or have been banished from their country, the greater number have been rude and illiterate men: and it will be found, that rapine and spoliation have been more attributable to that savage, reckless, and idle disposition, which generally usurps the mind in the absence of moral instruction, than to the arbitrary temptations to which want and wretchedness are themselves exposed. I cannot here avoid adverting to the sanguinary nature of our criminal code, which, with a mistaken policy, dooms to the same destruction the man who commits a com-

mon theft, and he who perpetrates parricide. The punishment of death is annexed to so great a number of offences in which the moral guilt appears not to deserve so awful a visitation, that the whole assumes a character of revenge. Hundreds of offenders are permitted to escape, from the abhorrence of the injured parties to be the means of depriving them of life ; though they would soon be found in the witness-box were the punishment apportioned to the crime. When executions for such offences occur, the general mind of the community is outraged. Men shrug their shoulders, and say, with a constrained respect, " such is the law ; " but the detestation of the crime, which the spectacle is intended to impress, is lost in pity for the offender. It is the fault, too, of our minor punishments, that they aim at a secret infliction of pain and privation, without the redeeming quality of reformation in the criminal. He is withdrawn from the view of his associates in crime, and from the world, until, on the expiration of his term of incarceration, he is cast upon society, without character, without means, and with a lurking desire to retaliate his sufferings by new spoliations. This is in opposition to the humane and intelligent spirit of the age, and it is to be hoped that it will be abandoned for a system which, by embracing the greater certainty of punishment rather than its severity, and aiming at the moral improvement of the offender, shall oppose a more effectual barrier to the commission of crime. It is to be lamented that there are strong prejudices in favour of the present law, and it may be years before it undergo a wholesome revision. But if we can reduce the number of sacrifices which it now sternly demands, we effect no inconsiderable benefit. And this may be done, with additional security to the public, and with a regard to their feelings, by extended education amongst the people. Let us not despair, because we cannot impart moral instruction to the basest portion of society : if we purify the general body, the fewer dregs there will be to sink to the bottom. And how many vices might not also be thus arrested, which evade the arm of public justice ; for there is a malignant cunning in absolute ignorance, frequently more oppressive to the community than open violence itself, which evades every mesh in the net of the law, and which can alone be removed by those principles of honour and self-estimation which are the fruits of a cultivated mind.

It has been objected to the education of the people, that it would lead them to question and discuss the political measures of the day, while the safety of the state demands their tacit obedience. This argument may pass unchallenged in the primers of children, but will be little revered by men who possess the quality of reason. Freedom of discussion, and legal complaint, form the grand safety-valves for the ebullition of public feeling in a free country. The fabric of the constitution can bear the closest inspection ; and though its minute beauties be not obvious to the vulgar gaze, the venerable whole must inspire all men with veneration. And surely the allegiance which is freely given to a government that is understood, is more firm and secure than that which is the result of blind obedience. The very charter of the land, which requires the people to choose their representatives, if it be not a political juggle, implies that every man who is an elector should acquaint himself with at least the simple elements of legislation, in order that he may not blindly elect a man who is deficient in capacity, or in honesty, for the high office of a senator. And there is surely more political danger to be apprehended from ignorant men, who may become the easy tools of designing and seditious adventurers, and who are accessible through the bribes and dissipation of an election, than from a sober-thinking intelligent body of workmen. An education which embraces an acquaintance with the true principles of the constitution, would strengthen the respect and attachment of the people to a wise administration, and would correct that impatience of measures, which, though silently working for the general good, appear to the eye of ignorance to be destructive of peculiar interests. The motives of those who would keep the people in darkness, lest they should discover their political condition, must, therefore, be ascribed either to an ignorance of the character of society, and the springs of human action, or to an interested desire to perpetuate the abuses of power or authority, against which would irresistibly be raised the indignant voice of an intelligent community.

With respect to education as it affects religious opinions and habits, little need be said ; for, few men will be found hardy enough to deny that knowledge is incompatible with piety. Indeed we have before us practical proofs that many of the most

learned men, and distinguished philosophers, are the strictest moralists, and the most sincere religionists. True religion has nothing to fear from philosophy, but much from ignorance. The former, by exhibiting the beauty and order of the moral and physical world, confirms and augments the veneration entertained by man for the Deity; the latter leaves him a prey to the most debasing and idolatrous superstition. Were the people more generally enlightened, the sense, and the feelings, of the better portion of the community would no longer be outraged by the folly of the besotted followers of Johanna Southcote, and other equally absurd and demoralizing impostors. The visionary raving of enthusiasts, the renewal of miracle working, and similar extravagancies, would vanish; and man would no longer vilify and oppress his neighbour, merely because he differed from him on points of conscience, and chose a different track in order to reach the same point; but each would regard and esteem his fellow being, inasmuch only as his professions were exemplified in his character of an honest man, and an industrious citizen. Mr. Brougham, in his admirable remarks on the education of the people, forcibly corroborates these opinions. "Happily (says he) the time is past and gone, when bigots could persuade mankind that the lights of philosophy were to be extinguished as dangerous to religion; and when tyrants could proscribe the instructors of the people as enemies to their power. It is preposterous to imagine that the enlargement of our acquaintance with the laws which regulate the universe, can dispose to unbelief. It may be a cure for superstition; for intollrance it will be a most certain cure; but a pure and true religion has nothing to fear from the greatest expansion which the understanding can receive by the study either of matter or of mind. The more widely science is diffused, the better will the Author of all things be known, and the less will the people be 'tossed to and fro by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.'"

It may be said, indeed, that there is not a rock, nor a mountain, nor a river, amongst the wildest sublimities of nature, but, touched by the talisman of science, they administer to the necessities or comforts of man; and who is there of so thankless a spirit as not to entertain that admiration of superior might and wisdom which is the very ground work of religion, when he

turns "from nature, up to nature's God," who has spread these abundant materials before him, and endowed him with a mind to apply them ?

The prejudice of weak minds against any degree of popular education is unhappily too often a secret failing, working unseen, to the disadvantage of society, and secure from the attacks of reason or of ridicule, which it would otherwise encounter. There is, however, one instance, within my recollection, (related by Mr. Buxton last year, at a meeting of the British and Foreign School Society) in which the folly of entertaining this unfortunate error is ludicrously exemplified. Mr. Buxton stated that he had lived in his youth with a gentleman who abhorred all education of the poor.* "He conceived there were three grand causes of wickedness amongst them—reading, writing, and arithmetic. When a quarrel took place in his neighbourhood, he was in the habit of saying, 'That is the effect of education.' If a theft or a murder were committed—'There' he would say 'is another test of the bad effects of education.' In speaking of his own steward, this hater of public improvement would say, 'That man, to his credit be it spoken, is not able to read a word, or to write a figure, and yet, perhaps, he is the best accountant in the kingdom.' It was natural to inquire by what process of memory the steward kept his accounts. This was shown. A drawer was produced : in one compartment there was a parcel of beans, in another a parcel of peas, and in the remaining divisions there were various descriptions of grain—the symbols of debts and payments, which, with the help of a strong memory, the steward kept with great exactness. One night, however, the landlord, anxious to satisfy himself of the state of his affairs, opened the drawer, when, lamentable to relate, he found that all was involved in the wildest confusion and doubt, for a rat had broken in and devoured his accounts current !"

But men of much higher pretensions to discernment than this country squire have, by a strange perversion of learning and genius, entertained opinions inimical to the education of the people ; and we have one instance of a celebrated French author advocating the cause of ignorance, with the warmth of an able lawyer who has unwittingly undertaken to defend a bad cause,

* This anecdote is derived from the newspaper reports of the day, and may not, perhaps, be so forcibly told as it was by Mr. Buxton.

and with a success which leaves us only to regret that a mind capable of better things should have wasted a moment on so preposterous a theme. Rousseau, who was in love with the theory of savage life, deprecated learning, as tending to promote crimes unknown to a rude and uncultivated state of society,—by making men acquainted with vice. He overlooked the fact, that our perceptions of virtue, like those of beauty, are only conveyed by fitness or comparison ; that, were there no deformity, there could be no beauty ;—if we knew not vice, virtue would cease to be understood ; and its practice, being involved in an arbitrary necessity, would cease to be laudable. It has been well said by an elegant essayist,* of this passage of Rousseau, that “ it is impossible to acquit him of the supposition, that in order to be virtuous, we must be so ignorant as to be incapable of vice. But if all the virtue which he contemplated were accomplished, it would be the virtue of an idiot, not the virtue of a man.” Voltaire, to whom Rousseau sent his work advocating the ignorance of man, thanked him in a flattering but satirical letter, in which he states, that “ never had so much wit been displayed in wishing to render us brutes, and that when he read his discourse he had a strong mind to go upon all-fours !” Rousseau contended, also, that “ science, learning, and the arts tended to destroy the sentiments of liberty inherent in man and to make him in love with slavery.” The dictum has only to be reversed in order to be admitted : for we believe it would be found to be a dangerous experiment of a tyrant to introduce learning and science amongst his slaves in order to fix their allegiance. Liberty and mind are so affianced that they are co-existent ; when despotism dooms the death of either, one common grave must receive them. And in what country, where learning is entirely suppressed, are the inhabitants other than mere animals—or bloody barbarians—or plunderers—or pirates ?—The liberty which is inherent in man, and which he would invariably exercise were his passions unrestrained by at least some portion of education, is nothing more than the exercise of physical force over weakness ; and it is no light task of parents in every civilized community to eradicate that “ liberty” in their children of which this Genevan Philosopher was so much enamoured.

* Walker.

Mr. M'Culloch, the celebrated political economist, in a lecture on national education, urges as a remedy for the poverty and wretchedness of the labouring classes, and particularly of the peasantry of Ireland, the instruction of labourers in that branch of his political economy which would induce a restraint upon the practice of marriage. He argues, that the fewer the labourers the higher their wages, and consequently the greater their comforts ;* a doctrine which, though not applicable to *all* circumstances, is so obvious in the abstract as to require no elaborate defence. But to assign the bulk of the miseries of Ireland to a contempt of Malthusian Philosophy, is, it appears to me, to take the *effect* of those miseries for the *cause* ; and such are already the privations of the Irish peasant, that I cannot too much admire the sagacity which could discover a new restraint to fix upon him ; a restraint which, if it be possible to impose it, would but constitute a compromise with complicated evils under which he ought not, in justice, to suffer,—and which have bated him down to little better than an animal existence. I say in justice ; for the able-bodied, and willing labourer, is worthy of his hire ; and the country which gave him birth, if it be not a barren desert, ought to provide him with at least the necessaries of life. To enumerate all the obvious and probable causes of the misery of the Irish would lead me beyond my immediate subject ; but I may briefly observe (as necessary to my argument) that errors in legislation have, for ages, gradually accumulated in the civil polity of that unhappy country ; and as the ivy, twined round the venerable oak, sucks out its vitality, and withers it in its embrace,—those evils have coiled round the whole body of a generous peasantry, and paralyzed those natural energies which would otherwise render Ireland a happy and a valuable country. On that island nature pours forth her bounty

* This position does not always hold good. It may be carried to extremes in an old settled country ; in a new country (such as South America) which is thinly peopled, and sufficiently prolific, the principle has the contrary effect—of restraining the exercise of the energies of the country. Some trades cannot be prosecuted at all without a number of workmen. If enough of food can be raised for a people, and there be materials within their reach, which may be converted into articles of luxury or necessity—nothing but indolence, ignorance, or bad government, can affect the prosperity of the population, however large.—It is strange that Sir W. Petty, in his “ Political Anatomy of Ireland,” written in 1676, says, that “ the want of people is the greatest and most fundamental defect of the kingdom.”—Now, perhaps with less of truth, the misery of Ireland is attributed by the Malthusians to an excess of the population. I shall credit the last opinion when, by any reasoning, I am convinced that Ireland, with the same encouragement and privileges as England, remains in her present degradation.

from the ample horn of her abundance, yet the labourer pines in misery and want ! It is not my province here to denounce the measures or the men that have produced this deplorable anomaly. Neither do I assume that the wisest measures which may be pursued could effect a speedy melioration. But rather than Mr. M'Culloch should terrify the poor Irishman from the honourable engagement of matrimony, by teaching him that starvation must be, or ought to be, the penalty of so high a misdemeanour, and that none should become husbands but withered grey-beards, who may take wives when they require nurses ;* it were better that he should exert his eloquence to persuade the legislature to remove from Ireland, as far as possible, all odious imposts in tithes and taxes, to encourage foreign and domestic commerce and manufactures—that the wages of labour may not be reduced to a diet of potatoes,—to teach Irish landlords humanity, and Irish magistrates justice ; to remove all unjust and impolitic disabilities on account of religious opinions ; and, in fine, to establish cheap schools for the education of the people, upon principles which shall secure them from the angry bickerings of contending religionists, and which shall imbue their minds with a love of honesty, and morality, and industry. If the Irish peasant were once accustomed to live in a decent house, and to enjoy these little domestic comforts which are common to the provident operatives of England and Scotland, these comforts, or luxuries, would become necessary to his very existence, and would not only stimulate his industry to acquire and increase them, but would prove the only legitimate check upon improvident marriages. No man of common sense would forego such enjoyments, by a wilful connexion which would reduce not only himself, but the object of his tenderest regard, to circumstances of privation and distress. In well-regulated societies, even amongst labourers, there is a species of disgrace attached to the marriage of parties who have no prospect of keeping up at least their former station in life—and this, too, operates as a wholesome check upon hasty marriages, in which the passions frequently over-rule the judgment. But in Ireland misery and privation are so common to the peasant, that the enjoyments

* One of the frequent evil effects of late marriages is, that children are left, by the death of their parents, in an unprotected orphanage—an evil which in Ireland must be doubly distressing from the want of poor-houses.

of a higher existence are, to him, altogether unknown; little is hoped for beyond the relief of the cravings of hunger; and marriage is, perhaps, amongst such beings, nothing but a closer companionship in misfortune. If the whole of the Irish peasantry were as one man, Mr. M'Culloch's proposition might possibly be listened to. But it addresses itself to individuals; and, ignorant as the peasant is, he cannot be expected to reflect upon remote consequences; and if he did, unless he were joined by the general body of his fellow-labourers, in abstinence from marriage, his own forbearance, he might well conclude, would have no sensible effect upon the reduction of population or the rise of wages. Give the industrious Irishman the means, and encourage him in the desire, to rise from his present degradation; multiply his comforts—and his disposition to marriage may be safely left to itself:—for, the terror of political economists, lest population should outgrow its means of subsistence, in a country such as England, where men are *determined* to enjoy some of the luxuries as well as the mere necessities of life, is altogether chimerical. The prosperity of the country at the present time, with a greater population than ever, and even under the baneful effects of a corn-law, affords an ample refutation of this doctrine of the Malthusians. Marriage is generally allowed to have a beneficial effect, too, upon the habits and morals of the labouring classes; and to reduce the number of marriages in Ireland, were it possible, through any other means than an elevation of the condition of the people, both morally and politically, would be but exchanging one evil for a greater:—for in place of converting it into a huge monastery for bachelors and vestal virgins, we should have a nation of licentious vagabonds, who would overrun the country with the illegitimate fruits of the new system of education!

It is a vulgar error to suppose that the introduction amongst a people of those delicacies and refinements, which are commonly called luxuries, are pernicious to society: for, so long as they are of a nature to gratify, without debasing; so long as they neither injure health nor render life effeminate and indolent, they are the strongest stimulants to the exertion of industry and genius.*

* "As man betters his external condition, and multiplies the conveniences of life, his views enlarge, he connects himself more closely with his fellow-man, he widens his connexions and dependencies, and, to accomplish this, his intellect and ingenuity are provoked; his man-

An elegant house, costly furniture, a fine shrubbery, a beautiful painting, an affecting poem, all tend to elevate the mind of the possessor, and to shut out grovelling passions; and to produce them gives food, and raiment, and comfort to thousands, who would otherwise expend the whole of their energies upon the clods of the valley for a subsistence. Mr. Roscoe thus happily exposes the senseless clamour against refinement. "We may morosely suppose that fine prospects, beautiful flowers, or sweet sounds, are below the dignity, or unworthy the attention of an improved and rational mind; but we cannot close our ears to the morning song of the lark, nor avoid the sight of the landscape; unless we refuse to breathe the breath of heaven, and relinquish the cheerful beam of day; and if we resolve that our palate shall not be gratified, we must deprive ourselves of that nutriment which is necessary to our very existence. Apply this to all the conveniences and even the elegancies of life; and then let us ask, what is the result of this system of intellectual and physical enjoyment, to which the cynical and short-sighted observer has applied the equivocal and injurious term of luxury? That great classes of the industrious part of the community are employed—ingenuity excited—talents rewarded—wealth circulated through an infinite variety of channels, and a general bond of union, arising from an interchange of services and rewards, is formed amongst the vast family of the human race.—'A man of benevolence,' says Mr. Dugald Stewart, 'whose mind is tinctured with philosophy, will view all the different improvements in arts, in commerce, and in the sciences, as co-operating to promote the union, the happiness, and the virtue of mankind.' Utility and pleasure are thus bound together in an indissoluble chain, and what the Author of Nature has joined, let no man put asunder."*

We may with truth adduce, as a main cause of the rapid strides which Great Britain has of late years made in arts, in sciences, in commerce, and in national wealth, the liberty of the press, and the consequent diffusion of information amongst the people at a moderate expense. Learning, once monopolized by a few, begins to spread her benign influence over the mass of

ners also become more insinuating, he courts his fellow by courtesy as well as by kindness: and thus sciences, the arts, urbanity, and the agreeable in form, address, and intercourse, advance with a step proportionate to the growing interests, utilities, and conveniences of life." *Walker*, vol. 1. p. 87.

* Address on the opening of, the Liverpool Royal Institution.

society, and, elevating the national character, confers upon us more of real glory than ages of bloody and successful warfare could ever achieve. Knowledge has increased and multiplied by its dissemination amongst an enlarged population; and who shall boldly aver that its further extension would not produce a further melioration in the condition of man; and that it is in vain to proceed in the march of improvement and enterprise? Let but the most sceptical on the benefits of education reflect on the vast developements of science within the last few years, and the general moral improvement of most of the European states;* let them mark the triumph of the chymist, and the engineer, and the merchant; let them behold the gallant ship propelled by an inexhaustible agent against the currents of the ocean and the contending winds;† let them view our streets on the winter night, before dotted with a few miserable lamps that served but to render the darkness visible, now illumined by a blaze of splendour, produced by means which, twenty years ago, had been

* *Whitaker* in his *Life of Sir George Radcliffe* quotes some Acts of Parliament from which the low state of public morals, and the rudeness of society, in the time of the First Charles may readily be inferred. One of these bills was "for restraining the barbarous custom of ploughing by the tail, of pulling the wool off living sheep, burning corn in the straw, barking standing trees, forcing cows to give milk, and building houses without chimneys."—Peter the First, of Russia, too, when he wished to civilize his country by introducing learning and the arts, found that drunkenness was so common, even at Court, that he was obliged to issue an edict to restrain the ladies of rank from drinking more than a certain number of glasses of brandy.

† The steam vessels, and the sailing packet ships of the present day, whether American or English, are so far superior to the craft of 50 years ago, that a comparison can scarcely be made between them in regard to size, speed, comfort, and cleanliness. A late New Orleans paper thus describes the steam-boats of that country, and the description applies to those of this, with the exception of the height of the respective vessels from the water.

"The majestic appearance of the steam-boats is one of the most striking objects in our harbour. Towering above the head of the pedestrian, the latter is not altogether without feelings of awe on approaching them. To this sensation in some succeeds admiration for such *chef-d'œuvres* of the genius and contrivance of our fellow men. We enter those floating villages, and find an immense storehouse for produce at our feet, and on either hand; whilst all the luxuries and conveniences of a palace are provided above. At the elevation of nearly twenty feet over that of the surrounding country, the voyager enjoys the view of a most interesting landscape, and all the advantages of the fresh air. He is transported from latitude to latitude, as it were by necromancy; no fatigue is felt, no exertion or care necessary. The vicissitudes of the weather touch him not. If he have but money in his purse, a nod will bring him to the richest wines, the finest fruits of the tropics, and those of the colder regions. Does he delight in poring over the black letter page of history or romance? no place more fit. Does he wish for conversation? numerous fellow passengers afford ample scope. When expedition and convenience are thus united, who can be unmindful of the benefits conferred on the country by the contrivers and managers of steam boats. The genius and perseverance of those men are gradually shortening the distance between one section of our country and another. A journey of five hundred leagues inland, is now performed as quickly as one of ninety some years ago; and we have little doubt but what Old Ocean will witness the march of steam before many years elapse."

deemed chimerical ; and even *they* will, in the exercise of their unbiassed judgment, be induced to exclaim :—" We seek not to stem the tide of genius. Let it roll on in its mighty sublimity. We would rather trim the lamp of knowledge, assured that it may yet emit a brighter blaze—a more genial warmth. Let us endeavour freely to diffuse its blessings, enlivening the humble dwelling of the artisan as well as the mansion of the great ; for its oil, like that of the widow's cruse, will never diminish by such a distribution ! "

It may seem superfluous to seek for further arguments in support of the utility of popular education. But I would fain impress the conviction, that society loses much by a mere lukewarm approval of such an object. I held it as an irrefragible axiom, that no nation ever fell into decay by force of its moral acquirements ; for it were monstrous to suppose that a country should breathe forth her last sighs in the arms of Intelligence. Education can neither be too great nor too general ; and there is much of useful talent and of genius which without the animating light of philosophy may remain dormant for ever. I would also bring to the recollection of the higher classes, that society owes a large debt to the operatives of England ; not only when considered as furnishing, by their skill and industry, a constant supply of all the comforts and elegancies of life, but as having sent from amongst them many of the most valuable and distinguished individuals whose names adorn the national biography of our country. Had our patriots, our poets, our philosophers, been allowed to spring only from the higher orders, England would not yet have reached her present commanding altitude in power and in letters. The various departments of science and learning ; the records of the senate, of the bar, of the field, and of the ocean, bear ample testimony to the triumphs of genius, cradled amidst the discouragements of poverty and obscurity. And let no birth-proud lordling look with disdain upon those who have honourably sprung from humble life to high places and distinctions. Genius is alike beneficial to society from whatever class it may arise. The rose may bloom at the door of the cottage, and its perfume is as sweet as if it adorned the more gaudy parterre of the palace. The man of lowly origin, who, by his own intrinsic worth and exertions, contributes to the dignity and happiness of his species, cannot, indeed, boast of heredi-

tary titles,—or of the honour of tracing his lineage from some august Saxon marauder, but his is, in the eye of reason, the noblest of all nobility: it is the nobility of genius and philanthropy.

The name of Franklin must be known to all. From the office of a humble journeyman printer, this man rose, by his genius and unwearied perseverance, to be, perhaps, the most distinguished statesman and philosopher of the 18th century. The origin of all his greatness may be dated from the perusal of a few books, to obtain which he submitted even to a sort of starvation. Franklin was a first-rate discoverer in science; but he was more; he was the friend of the human race, one of the great consolidators of his country's independence, and the last public act of his life was to implore that government, which owed him so large a debt of gratitude, to abolish the disgraceful traffic in the human species.

It is a remarkable fact, that most of the celebrated statesmen of the transatlantic states have risen to the highest honours, by the mere force of their education and industry. Mr. Crawford, a late candidate for the Presidential Chair, pursued, for a long time, the humble but honourable vocation of a village school-master.

In our own country, the list of celebrated men who have merged from lowly life, and contributed to rear the fabric of her glory, is bright and numerous. Shakspeare, that prince of dramatic poetry; he who "exhausted worlds, and then imagined new,"—was but the son of a wool-comber at Stratford on Avon. His fame will live for-ever; and it were literary sacrilege to attempt, with feeble pen, to emblazon it here.—Burns, the unrivalled bard of Caledonia, whose verses will be sung when the dialect in which they are written has ceased to be that of his country, was bred to the laborious occupations of the husbandman. To use his own expression, "The Genius of poetry found him at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over him." This great and eccentric poet had an early predilection for books, and the scanty libraries of some gentlemen in the neighbourhood were his eager and grateful resort, and served to cherish to maturity those talents which afterwards shone forth with so much splendour. Scotland owes him much. No man ever did more,—such are the feeling and pathos of his pastorals,

to polish the asperities of rustic life, and imbue it with the most ennobling chivalry and patriotism—the most guiltless devotion to the humanities and hospitalities of life. And while domestic affection and morality,—while the purest attachments of our nature continue to be prized, and while wit and poetry are admired, his “Cotter’s Saturday Night,” his “Man was made to mourn,” and his “Tam O’Shanter” will be read with instruction and delight.

Amongst those of humble origin, whose literary and scientific labours have adorned their country, may be adduced Mr. Gifford, the poet and critic, whose father was but a shoemaker; Bloomfield, author of “The Farmer’s Boy,” a title which implied his own station in life; Holcroft, the dramatist, and many others. And it may not be irrelevant to mention the name of that highly esteemed and accomplished author and scholar, the self-taught venerable Roscoe, who has done more than any other individual to chasten and promote the literary taste of that huge emporium of commerce, Liverpool, his native town; and whose unremitting labours for the removal of the barbarities of our criminal code, and the improvement of prison discipline, are worthy of the highest meed of the philosopher as well as of the philanthropist.

Of the most humble parentage, was Cooke,* the celebrated circumnavigator. He was the son of a poor cottager in Yorkshire, and was, in early life, inured to the labours of the field. His education was restricted merely to reading and writing, and the first rules of arithmetic. But his own application amply atoned for the scantiness of his early instruction. He served a long and arduous apprenticeship on board of a collier, that practical school of seamanship. He afterwards entered on board a man-of-war, where his bravery, ability, and diligence so strongly recommended him to his officers, that he was raised to the post of sailing-master, and, soon after, was promoted to a lieutenancy. It was not long before he became a celebrated astronomer and surveyor—and his talents were duly appreciated. He prosecuted three voyages of discovery round the world,—in the last of which he unhappily perished in an affray with some of the

* We have another recent example (amongst many others) in naval annals:—Collingwood, Captain of Lord Nelson’s ship, in the battle of Trafalgar, was a *foremast man*.

inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands,* after having enriched his country by the value and the number of his discoveries. The records of his perils and his perseverance will be read for ages yet to come. His death was lamented by the whole civilized world.

Emerson, one of the first mathematicians of his time, and author of many celebrated works, was the son of a poor school-master in Hurworth, in Yorkshire. And Toxteth, in the county of Lancaster, was the birth place of Jeremiah Horrocks, an eminent astronomer of the seventeenth century. He was the first who predicted and saw the passage of Venus over the sun's disk, a discovery from which he drew many invaluable facts, and from which his successors in the science ascertained the parallax and distance of the sun and planets. His new theory of lunar motions formed the ground-work of the lunar astronomy of Newton, who spoke of him as a genius of the first order. It is worthy of notice, that when this talented man first applied himself to the study of astronomy, his father's circumstances were so embarrassed that he was destitute of proper books, and other assistance; and those volumes which he could procure were erroneous or obsolete, and led him into mistaken theories. Had public libraries for indigent genius been then established, his studies would have received an earlier impulse; his discoveries would have been pursued with more vigour, and he might have lived to complete that admirable system to which he gave the clue, and which it occupied the time and genius of after-philosophers to mature.

In Lancashire, too, rose the celebrated mechanic Arkwright, who, from the most unassuming occupations, advanced himself to usefulness, affluence, and honour. He was an apprentice to a barber, in Preston; and from his perseverance and excellent inventions in the machinery for spinning cotton, may, perhaps, be dated the superiority of England as a manufacturing country. Arkwright enriched himself and his family by the honourable application of his talents. He was raised to the honour of knighthood, and died worth a million sterling.—By his side we may place the late Mr. Watt, the adapter of that mighty agent

* The present inhabitants of these Islands are docile and harmless, and they have made no small progress in the arts of civilized life. To what is this rapid change to be ascribed? Truly to education—to the instruction they have received from foreigners.

of our greatness, the steam engine, to the various purposes of manufacture—and to objects beyond the unaided physical powers of man. Nor must we forget the clever, but poor and neglected, Henry Bell,* who, it is not disputed, was the first who successfully introduced the agency of steam to vessels navigating the waters of Great Britain. And I am here reminded of the observation of a speaker at a late meeting in Glasgow, for promoting subscriptions for a monument to the memory of Mr. Watt, that—"we once had a Primate of England who was the son of a butcher; we now have a Lord Chancellor, who is the son of a coal-dealer, and a Secretary of State, who is the son of a calico printer.

These are a few only of those men of talent who have struggled through the most disheartening obstacles to fame and distinction; but it would be unjust not to admit that many gifted minds must have sunk under the pressure of poverty—the freezing chill of neglect, and the want of those primary means of instruction, without which genius may linger on into decrepitude, and never become serviceable to mankind. Well may we exclaim with Beattie,—

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar;
Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime,
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged, with fortune, an eternal war;
Checked by the scoff of pride, by envy's frown,
And poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale, remote, has pined alone,
Then dropped into a grave, unpitied and unknown!"

The waste of intellect, arising from a want in proper instruction amongst the operative classes, as well as others, would no longer exist, were education more widely extended amongst the people. "There is" said the Rev. Andrew Wilson, at a late meeting for the formation of a Mechanics' School of Arts, "much mental and corporal energy allowed to run waste, because there is no one to direct the stream into its proper channel. How much toil and ingenuity have been squandered

* While monuments are every where erecting to the memory of the late Mr. Watt; and parliamentary grants are made to Mr. M'Adam for recent improvements in roads, which have been practised in Scotland for perhaps 50 years,—is nothing to be done for this meritorious man—who has little more than £50 a year, which is granted him by the Corporation of Glasgow?

on attempts to realize the phenomenon of a perpetual motion, while a slight acquaintance with the first principles of mechanical philosophy would shew that all such attempts are utterly preposterous. Many talented mechanics are engaged in inventing what has been discovered long ago, and are consequently spending their ingenuity in vain. But instruction would direct their efforts to the proper path, and would give birth to many new discoveries. Every process of art is dependant upon some scientific principle, whether it be recognized or remain concealed. And no improvement can be expected, if men are contented to tread servilely in the steps of their forefathers, or surrender themselves to the random conjectures of a wild imagination. The operator must be guided in his researches by the lights of genuine science; and workmen are possessed of great manual dexterity, and are placed in circumstances the most favourable for making discoveries." The opinion that science is of the utmost benefit to the artist has been long entertained by learned men. Lord Kaimes, in an essay on Logic, remarks—"There is perhaps no practical art which may not be acquired, in a very considerable degree, by example and practice, without reducing it to rules. But practice, joined to rules, may carry a man on in his art further and more quickly than practice without rules. Every ingenious artist knows the utility of having his art reduced to rules, and thereby made a science. He is thereby enlightened in his practice, and works with more assurance. By rules he may sometimes correct his own errors, and often detects the errors of others: he finds them of great use to confirm his judgement, to justify what is right, and to condemn what is wrong." There is, indeed, no mechanical employment, even to the steadily and firmly driving of a nail, which may not be abridged or assisted by a knowledge of scientific principles. The mechanic may, sometimes, derive from a single hint of a mechanical philosopher, more valuable information than he might gather by mere accidental practice in a course of years; and every advance in such studies gives him additional power and dexterity as a workman. The objection, that there are some occupations which require the exclusive devotion of the apprentices' or journeymen's whole attention, upon which any portion of time devoted to study would infringe, I consider to be unfounded and absurd. There is no regular trade which requires the whole

of a man's time. Casualties may arise to prolong the hours of labour, but unless masters exact an unjust servitude from their servants, the health of workmen, as well as the due refreshment of their physical powers, require some hours of freedom, apart from those usually devoted to sleep. The shorter these hours are, the more seductive are the ready allurements of the tavern and other idle or pernicious places of resort: and the question is—Is it better to leave the workman exposed to these temptations, or to invite him to the “feast of reason” which genius has prepared, and, by engrafting literature and science upon the stock of industry, impart a new and ennobling feature to a large and valuable class of the community?

The generosity of the public in establishing numerous cheap or gratuitous schools has already done much towards the moral improvement of the poorer classes of society. It has extended, in a surprising degree, the capacity and the desire to obtain information by reading; and the consequent demand for books has elicited from the press works admirably calculated for the cultivation of the mind, by dispensing, in an easy and comprehensive manner, the rich elements of every species of literature,—before too much incrustated by the pedantries and technicalities of the ancient school. Much of that learning which was before attainable only by those who studied the dead languages, is now placed within the reach of those of moderate fortune; and the works of the British historian, the philosopher, the traveller, the mechanist, and the essayist, supply a stream of information which elevates our country to the distinction of a classical and scientific land. But even these comparatively cheap sources of knowledge are beyond the pecuniary reach of many of those industrious members of society, whom the exertions of their parents, or the benevolence of the public, have enabled to read—unless they be assisted, in the first instance, by their wealthy fellow citizens. They are already ripe for instruction, and it were grievous to allow this aptitude to perish for want of proper materials for moral exercise—or to permit it to expend itself uselessly on the ephemeral and shadowy periodical literature of the day, on the declamatory lucubrations of party politicians, or on the effeminating romance with which our minor circulating libraries too often abound.

Let me now hope that I have succeeded in removing from the minds of some all objections to the education of the people;

that I have fixed the wavering opinions of others to a conviction of its numerous advantages; and that the question is now asked,—How may the liberal diffusion of knowledge be most effectually promoted?

I answer, by donations and subscriptions, to assist in the establishment of circulating Libraries, and Schools of Art, for the Mechanics and Apprentices,—to which lectures may be attached: for, the main support of such institutions, to be popular and efficient, must be derived from those for whose benefit they are purposed. “In all plans of this description,” says Mr. Brougham, “it is absolutely necessary that the expenses should be mainly defrayed by those for whose benefit they are intended. It is the province of the rich to lay the foundation, by making certain advances which are required in the first instance, and enabling the poor to come forward both as learners and contributors. But no such scheme can either take deep root, or spread over the country, so as to produce its full measure of good, unless its support is derived from those who are chiefly to reap the benefits. Those benefits are well worth paying for; they are not only of great value in the improvement and gratification they afford to the mind, but in the direct additions which they make to the pecuniary resources of the labouring classes.”

It must be considered, that to provide a suitable establishment for a library-room, lecture-room, and model-room, together with the books and the scientific apparatus, a sum is required, which is beyond the immediate means of the operatives themselves; and thus, (though they could, and cheerfully would, support the current expenses when once the establishment was fairly on foot, and even in time liquidate any advances by way of loan, if such, in addition to the donations and subscriptions, were required,) the object might be delayed for years, or might eventually fail, if not aided by the wealthier classes of the community. The coldness and jealousy, too, with which the mental improvement of the people has, until the present day, been unhappily too generally regarded, have excited amongst the men some degree of mistrust, and apprehension of giving offence to their employers, which it is desirable should be removed by the generous countenance and support of the rich. Mr. Brougham has so ably pointed out, in detail, how the object in view may be

best effected with reference to the several communities of large and small towns, &c.; and the examples of the successful establishment of Mechanics' Schools of Art, and Mechanics' and Apprentices' Libraries are now so numerous, that little need be said on this part of the subject. The management of such establishments should be divided between the general subscribers and the men: and perhaps the plan adopted for the School of Arts in Liverpool will scarcely admit of amendment. The committee of management consists of twenty-four persons, one third chosen from the labouring class; one third from the master mechanics or master tradesmen, and one third from the general subscribers, gentlemen who belong to neither of these classes. "By this arrangement (says Dr. Traill, in his sensible address on the establishment of the institution) it is hoped that we shall obtain the assistance of every class, combining the general information of the two latter with the practical experience of the artificers. I am not without hope that thus bringing into friendly communication persons in the different walks of life, all animated with the same generous views, all anxious for the moral and intellectual improvement of their fellow-men, will have a salutary effect, by inspiring juster ideas of each other than could be formed in the common intercourse of life. It will exhibit to the rich, in a new and favourable point of view, the good sense and talents of the working-classes: it will add to the conviction of the latter, that, among their wealthier fellow-citizens, there are many who will devote their time and attention to obtain for their poorer brethren the advantages of instruction; and I trust the result will convince all of the truth of the saying of the great English philosopher,—'Knowledge is power.'"

When such institutions are once established, it is hoped that the gentlemen who have contributed to them in the beginning, will still continue their support, and, above all, that they will countenance them by their occasional presence at the lecture-room or the library; for this would dignify the whole in the eyes of the workmen, and would cement that desirable feeling of reciprocal good-will between the parties, under the auspices of which the institutions started into existence.

In addition to the means of support already urged, there are others which have not, I believe, been dwelt upon by any writer on this subject, and which I would respectfully urge:—

First,—There are many Corporate Bodies in Borough towns who have large estates, part of which they usually devote to the support of free-schools. Such funds cannot be better or more honourably employed; and Corporations cannot find a more legitimate object for the further exertion of their bounty, than the support, by occasional grants, of institutions for the instruction of the adult population. If it be good to teach the children to read and write, it is surely good to teach them, when they reach years of discretion, how best to apply those advantages for the benefit of the community.

Secondly,—There are few individuals in easy circumstances who have not on their shelves some books of which they have duplicates in newer editions—or for which they have no use themselves, but which would be highly acceptable and valuable in the Mechanics' Library.* Let them look out for such books and send them to the committee, and they will deserve the praise of a philanthropic action. It is not always in the power, even of men of fortune, to give such munificent donations as have conferred immortal glory upon Sir Francis Burdett; but all may do something, and he who does what he can is worthy of the highest honour.

Thirdly,—To individuals who are thirsting for knowledge, time is as valuable as books. Unfortunately, some vocations either demand long and close attendance or labour, from their nature, (as for instance, shop-keepers) or from (a more general cause) some mismanagement on the part of masters. The hours of labour, in England, generally, appear to me to be too long. There is little time left either for manly sports, or for the improvement of the mind; and a late enactment in parliament restricting the hours of labour of children in factories is a melancholy proof of the cruel confinement which unrestrained avarice would frequently inflict even upon the young and helpless. Any amendment with respect to workmen generally, must be left to the growing intelligence of society; and it is hoped that the time is not far distant, when it will be generally acknowledged that the longer a man works beyond a daily period somewhat less than that now established, it does not necessarily follow that he either works more or works better. Were labour re-

* The Mechanics' Library in Liverpool has received between two and three thousand good volumes of this description. Not fifty volumes have been *bought* for the institution.

warded, where it is possible, with reference to its quantity or produce, more than by the time it occupies, it would be done more skilfully, more dexterously, and more cheaply. But I here address myself to these avocations, wherein the time of attendance of apprentices or journeymen is indefinite, and at the will of the employer; and I regret to say that the attendance of youths in shops, in offices of petty-traders, and also in merchants' counting houses,* is often protracted to a late hour of the night, sometimes with no ostensible object than that of mere show. The hours of business may, except in extraordinary cases, be shortened in counting houses without any loss; and the practice of keeping late hours is not, indeed, so common as it was some years ago. With regard to shops, the period of business (except, perhaps, in the metropolis, and in some few trades) might, were the shopkeepers unanimous, be reduced several hours without any detriment whatever; for individuals would supply themselves within business hours. The present system is nothing but an encouragement to improvident housewives and careless customers. In shops requiring protracted attendance, some of the apprentices or journeymen might be released in nightly or weekly rotation, at an hour which would leave them some time for relaxation and reading; and good conduct and industry might beneficially be rewarded by an extra hour or two for this purpose. Let masters try the experiment, and I have no doubt, from my own experience of the good effects of reading on the young men of the Liverpool Mechanics' Library, but they will experience the benefit of their liberality in the improved conduct and assiduity of those under their charge.

Fourthly,—I would recommend that Libraries of Mechanics' Institutions should not be confined to scientific works alone, but should embrace the whole range of general literature; not even excluding works of fiction which are not of immoral tendency. The utility of history, biography, voyages and travels, natural philosophy, and the British classics, will scarcely be denied: but works of fancy must not be forgotten, as they serve to encourage a taste and an aptitude for reading, in youths or

* The well regulated counting houses which shut at six or seven in the evening, are generally superior, in point of dispatch and business, to those in which clerks are confined till eight and nine.

others who are not used to books—to whom works exclusively scientific would at first be somewhat repulsive, but to which, as they advanced, they would resort for more solid instruction. Much good is done if a desire for reading be promoted, even by novels. Where there is one institution only in a town, with one library, let general literature, therefore be admitted. Where there are two, namely, a Mechanics' Library of general books, accessible to persons of all ages who can read, and also a higher School of Arts, for adults, the library of the latter may perhaps be exclusively composed of works of science :* but even in this case it will not be so popular, nor so well supported, as it would did the library admit miscellaneous literature. Where there are two such institutions (and I care not how many there be, if they be well supported) one lecture-room might be appropriated to both ; the lectures to embrace subjects which would sometimes suit the capacity of younger students, and sometimes those who were further advanced ; and those who have not leisure or inclination to attend the lectures, (which should be conducted with great economy) ought not, on that account, to be excluded from the libraries ; for, if they continue to read, they will soon fit themselves to comprehend and enjoy the lectures, and, though closely confined, will attend when they can. The spectacle of hundreds of industrious individuals, who have finished the labours of the day, congregating together in a spacious apartment, listening with mute admiration to the sublime truths of philosophy, is truly worthy of a great and enlightened people. It is by thus opening the book of science to the people, and inviting those amongst them who have the industry and genius to be useful to their fellow men, to ascend to their proper stations in society, that the hidden energies and resources of the country can be elicited to their full extent.

As there are many well-meaning individuals who are still inimical to works of fiction, I shall here fortify my own opinion, which is founded upon experience, by adducing the opinions of distinguished individuals, whose acquaintance with mankind it will surely not be ventured to dispute. If we look to the object of novels we shall be assured that their tendency must necessarily be to confirm virtuous impressions. They are written for our

* The proposed Library of the School of Arts in Liverpool is to be of "books connected with the useful arts."

delight ; and that delight arises from the interest we feel in, and the admiration we entertain for, great and magnanimous deeds—the pleasure we experience on beholding persecuted and long-suffering virtue, triumph over perfidy, cruelty, and injustice. The general tendency (says Dunlop) even of terrific romances, is virtuous. The wicked marquis or villainous monk meet at length with the punishment they deserve, while the hero or heroine enjoys, in conjugal happiness, the extensive property of which she has been deprived. “All this,” says our author, “may be very absurd, but life has, perhaps, few things better than sitting at a chimney corner in a winter evening, after a well spent day, and reading such absurdities.” On the same subject, the celebrated Bacon writes : “As the active world is inferior to the rational soul, so fiction gives to mankind what history denies, and in some measure satisfies the mind with shadows, when it cannot enjoy the substance. Fiction strongly shows that a greater variety of things, a more perfect order, a more beautiful variety, than can any where be found in nature, is pleasing to the mind. And as real history gives us not the success of things, according to the deserts of nature and virtue, fiction corrects it, and presents us with the fates and fortunes of persons rewarded or punished according to merit. And, as real history disgusts us with a familiar and constant similitude of things, fiction relieves by unexpected turns, and changes, and thus not only delights, but inculcates morality and nobleness of soul.” Knox, too, speaking of the moral instruction which is derived from books generally, says : * “It is true that books do, indeed, represent things better than they are ; but it is true that in doing so, they do what they ought. They endeavour to raise human nature, and they succeed in the attempt ; for, however bad the world may be, the extremes of wickedness are to be found among those who do not read, not among those who have been educated in the doctrines of the moral philosophers ; and whatever exalted excellence occurs in the world, is chiefly produced by men whose minds have been cultivated by moral reflection.”

Let me not, however, be understood to recommend to the mechanics and apprentices the reading of works of imagination chiefly. On the contrary, I but advocate the admissibility to the shelves

* Knox's Essays. Vol. I. p. 126.

of the library, of a small number of select books of this description, as useful, in many cases, to lead to better things ; a long and exclusive course of such reading I would resolutely oppose. All that I would urge is, that such books are generally of a moral tendency, and while they do not interfere with more important and weightier studies, they may become a source of innocent relaxation, combining some degree of instruction with delight.

Amongst a community who are taught to read, a well selected library (particularly if a lecture be attached to it) is, perhaps, the most powerful as well as the cheapest engine of instruction. Books are the legacies of genius—the tablets which convey the mental excellencies—the concentrated experience of the past and present ages, in an easy and comprehensive manner ; and thus serve to perpetuate whatever is useful or agreeable to man. He who has acquired a taste for reading, will always find, in a good book, an intelligent and delightful companion. Not only may he trace the wonders which Nature every where presents to the eye of the naturalist, but the whole panorama of art and science is open to his inspection. He may learn the inventions, discoveries, and attainments of those who have preceded him in pursuits congenial with his own ; and without wasting his mind in the slow developement of first principles, he may at once take his stand on the vantage ground which genius has already raised, and direct his energies, in their unimpaired freshness, to still higher achievements. Independent of the scientific instruction thus derived from books, nothing can be more conducive to the moral improvement of a people, than the perusal of works which combine amusement with instruction. And since the establishment of Mechanics' libraries, how many youths, who might otherwise be squandering their time in idleness or profligacy, are nightly seated in the family circle, reading aloud ;—

“ The poet's or historian's page, by one
Made vocal, for the amusement of the rest.”

When Petrarch remained in seclusion at Vacluse, his friends wondered how he could live—“ in winter sitting like an owl in his chimney corner, in summer roaming in solitude about the fields.”—“ These friends of mine (says Petrarch) * regard the pleasures of the world as the supreme good. They do not comprehend that it is possible to renounce these pleasures. They

* Life of Plutarch. Vol. II. p. 165.

are ignorant of my resources. I have friends whose society is delightful to me ; they are persons of all countries, and of all ages ; distinguished in war, in councils, and in letters ; easy to live with, always at my command. They come at my call, and return when I desire them : they are never out of humour, and they answer all my questions with readiness. Some present in review before me the events of past ages ; others reveal to me the secrets of nature ; these teach me how to live, and those how to die : these dispel my melancholy by their mirth, and amuse me by their sallies of wit ; and some there are who prepare my soul to suffer every thing, and to become thoroughly acquainted with itself. In a word, they open a door to all the arts and sciences. As a reward for such great services, they require only a corner of my little house, where they may be sheltered from the depredations of their enemies. In fine, I carry them with me into the fields, the silence of which suits them better than the business and tumults of cities."

I can conceive no more delightful picture than the youth in the bosom of his family, with a volume in his hand, exploring the rich mines of science and learning, or dwelling, with intense feeling, on the developement of some moral and pathetic tale. While he warms with the interest excited by the adventures of a Crusoe—the perils of a Cooke, the sufferings of a Park—he may exclaim with the bard when he describes the voyager—

"He travels and expatiates ; as the bee
From flower to flower, so he from land to land.
The manners, customs, policy, of all
Pay contribution to the store he gleans.
He sucks intelligence in every clime,
And spreads the honey of his deep research
At his return—a rich repast for me.
He travels, and I too. I tread the deck,
Ascend the topmast, through his peering eyes
Discover countries with a kindred heart,
Suffer his woes and share in his escapes ;
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit and is still at home."

It is truly gratifying to observe, that the several institutions already established have received the substantial support of many gentlemen of the first distinction, without regard to political or religious opinions. The animosity which in troublous

times was wont to divide even good men into hostile parties, has happily died away ; and thousands who before were dissevered, have united in the benevolent resolution to leave the world brighter than they found it, and thus to bequeath to posterity the most noble of all inheritances, a country whose power, and happiness, and resources, are protected by the united bulwark of its freedom and its intelligence. Let those for whose benefit these institutions are set on foot reflect, that while education is an honour and an embellishment to the rich, it is a fortune to the poor, of which they can never be deprived, and which will multiply their chances in the lottery of life ; and they will accept with gratitude the exertions which are made in their behalf, and determine to devote a small portion of their earnings to the support of establishments which promise them so many and so great advantages.

Mr. Brougham, in his late address to the students of the Glasgow University, thus feelingly advocates the benefits of the education of the wealthier community, to themselves, and, through their benevolent exertions, to their poorer brethren. "Study, I beseech you, so to store your minds with the exquisite learning of former ages, that you may always possess within yourselves sources of rational and refined enjoyment, which will enable you to set at nought the grosser pleasures of sense, whereof other men are slaves ; and so imbue yourselves with the sound philosophy of later days, forming yourselves to the virtuous habits which are its legitimate offspring, that you may walk unhurt through the trials that await you, and may look down upon the ignorance and error that surround you, not with lofty and supercilious contempt, as the sages of olden times, but with the vehement desire of enlightening those who wander in darkness, and who are by so much the more endeared to us by how much they want our assistance."

And how can I better express the eternal honours, the glory, which await those who thus benevolently lend their means or their exertions to dispel those clouds of ignorance and error which yet overshadow the happiness of their less favoured countrymen, than in the affecting language of the same enlightened individual, in the address alluded to :—

"If (says Mr. Brougham) the benefactors of mankind, when they rest from their pious labours, shall be permitted hereafter

as an appropriate reward of their virtue, the privilege of looking down upon the blessings with which their toils and sufferings have clothed the scene of their former existence ; do not vainly imagine, that, in a state of exalted purity and wisdom, the founders of mighty dynasties, the conquerors of new empires, or the more vulgar crowd of evil doers, who have sacrificed to their own aggrandisement the good of their fellow creatures, will be gratified by contemplating the monuments of their inglorious fame ! Theirs will be the delight—theirs the triumph—who can trace the remote effects of their benevolence in the improved condition of their species, and exult in the reflection that the prodigious change they now survey, with eyes that age and sorrow can make dim no more—of knowledge become power—virtue sharing the dominion—superstition trampled under foot—tyranny driven from the world—are the fruits, precious, though costly, and though late repaid, yet long enduring, of all the hardships and all the hazards they encountered here below.”

And let not the enemies of knowledge vainly exult in the idea that their heartless opposition will involve the world in that darkness which they prefer to the light. The pure stream of intelligence is silently but surely rolling on, and though they may retard, they can no more arrest its sublime progress than they can beat down the rising waves of the ocean,

Which “rolled not back when Canute gave command.”

All that philanthropy can effect—and it is a godlike purpose—is to accelerate its course, and to direct it into its proper channels, that, as the Nile in its flood impregnates the plains with verdure and with beauty, its sacred waters may sparkle even in the lowly vallies of life, and fertilize and invigorate the boundless world of intellect.

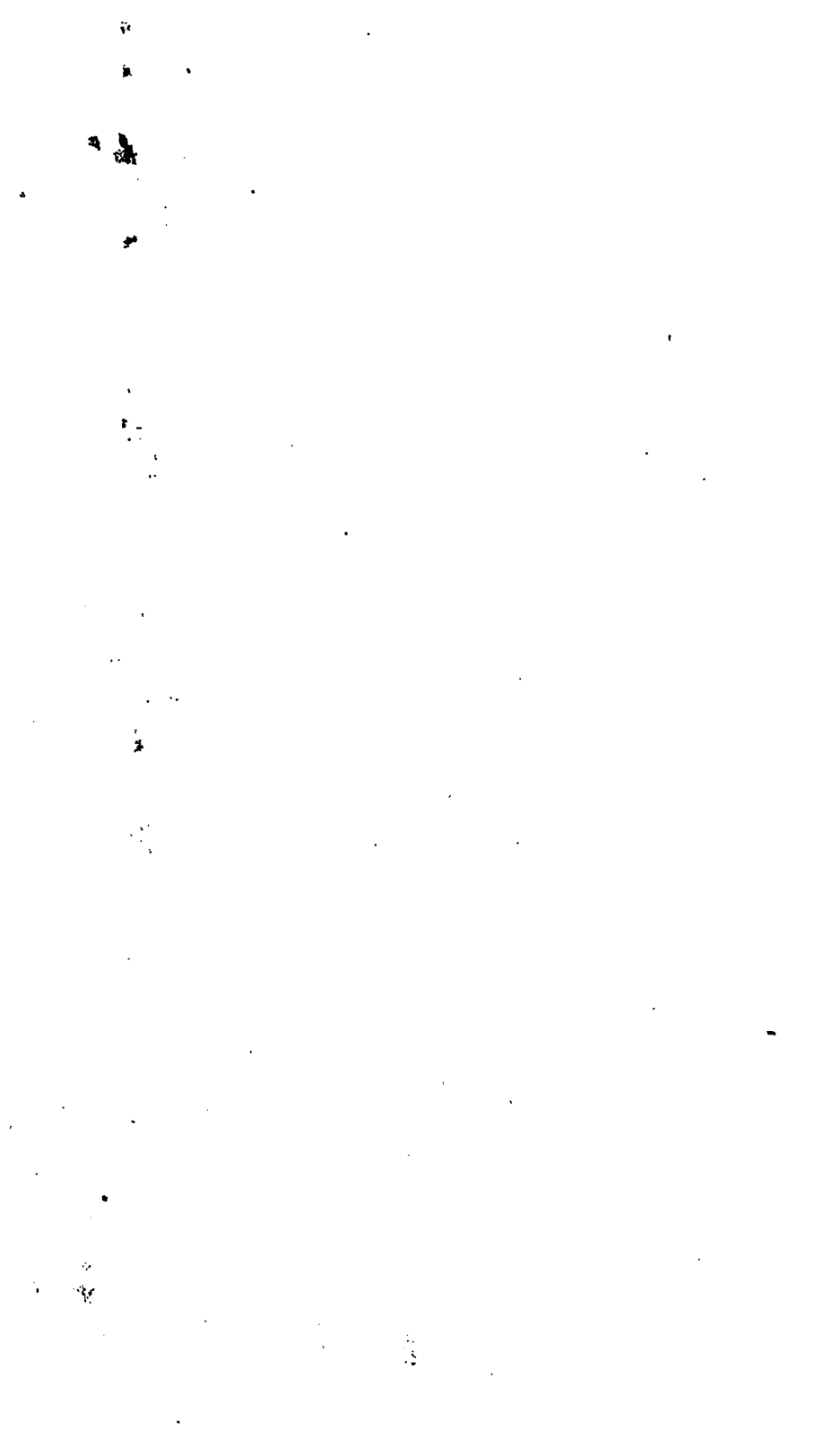
I feel and I deplore my inadequacy to exhibit in their fullest worth, the vast, the boundless advantages of education amongst all classes of the people. But should I succeed, as a humble pioneer, in clearing the way for the advance of a few recruits to increase that band of patriots who have already engaged in the glorious campaign against ignorance—the deadliest enemy of mankind—I shall have achieved the consummation of my hopes. Never, perhaps, was there a more favourable occasion for their exertions than now, when the nations smoke the calumet of

peace, and domestic prosperity leaves to the working classes that contentment and leisure requisite for moral improvement. Not only would the promoters of knowledge experience the high gratification of beholding the whole fabric of society become more elevated and refined, but the enviable delight might be theirs, before they close their earthly career, to hear numbers of those who have been the objects of their bounty, gratefully declare that, guided by the torch of knowledge which was placed within their grasp, they had explored their way from poverty and obscurity, to stations of usefulness, and dignity, and honour. By all that is valuable—all that is sacred in humanity, it behoves the affluent to further the spread of intelligence amongst their less fortunate fellow-countrymen ! It is a debt which they owe for their more propitious lot. The genuine patriot can find no occupation more congenial to his feelings—the Christian none more acceptable in the sight of his God. The power, the dignity, the happiness of a people—all are concentrated in their intelligence ; and though it were visionary to entertain the hope of perfection, however commendable it be to aim at its attainment, the benevolent promoters of popular instruction—those who strive

“ to drive the mind

To its best use—the service of mankind”—

may blamelessly indulge in the delightful anticipation that their exertions will hasten the approach of an era, when the general glow of knowledge shall wither up the heartless ministers of oppression and fanaticism ; by extending the world of mind, give new dominion over the world of matter ; and, reducing the sum of human wretchedness and vice, unite the whole family of mankind in the sacred bonds of brotherhood and virtue.



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